



## **Frequently Asked Questions Union Square Zoning Amendments**

### **1. What is a PUD?**

A Planned Unit Development (PUD) is the development of an area of land as a single entity under a comprehensive site master plan. A PUD development requires a mixture of land uses, densities, open space, and building types and designs. PUDs are only permitted in Planned Unit Development (PUD) Districts, which have been established to encourage new development in the City's major economic development areas.

Somerville currently has two PUD districts, PUD-A in the Assembly Square area, and PUD-B in Boynton Yards and in East Somerville near the Stop & Shop. A developer in a PUD district may choose to follow either the base zoning or the PUD zoning, but s/he must meet minimum requirements to qualify for the latter. PUD approval is a two-step process requiring first, approval of a preliminary master plan and second, approval of a special permit with site plan review (SPSR). SPSR approval may be further divided into additional phases depending on the scope of the development. PUD approvals are administered by the Planning Board and reviewed with respect to a number of factors including but not limited to construction of public improvements, landscaping, environmental impact, density, size of lots, setbacks, heights, open space, perimeter and transition, and parking and loading. Additional details of approval may be found in the Somerville Zoning Ordinance Sections 5.2, 5.3, 16.8, and 16.9.

### **2. Is the Union Square Arts Overlay District similar to the PUD-C?**

The Arts Overlay District has been developed to support and encourage arts and arts-related uses in the Union Square district. It is similar to the PUD-C in that it provides incentives for artist housing and studios, and it also provides zoning relief for arts-based uses and parking relief for new uses in existing buildings which do not increase their net floor area. However, it has a lower allowable density than the PUD-C.

### **3. Why should there be a PUD in Union Square?**

The PUD-C and PUD-C1 have been proposed to encourage the careful redevelopment of the square. The city foresees significant regional development pressures in the future, not the least of which is the introduction of a future MBTA Green Line station. These PUDs provides incentives to developers including increased density and heights that previously did not exist, and they also require the developer to provide a mix of uses and usable open space and undergo a significant review process.

#### **4. What are the differences between the existing zoning and the proposed zoning amendments?**

The existing zoning districts are still in place and are described in the current Somerville Zoning Ordinance. The proposed amendments are overlay districts, which have their own requirements independent of the underlying districts.

#### **5. Is there precedence for this type of zoning change?**

PUD and overlay districts are very common throughout the Boston area and the United States. In many cases they may be recognized by a different name, but the concepts are the same. An overlay district is an additional zoning requirement that is placed on a geographic area but does not change the underlying zoning. They serve to consolidate that area under a single set of zoning regulations to encourage a specific type of development.

#### **6. Is a development being proposed/built in Union Square?**

At this time there is no specific development proposed in Union Square that is associated with the proposed zoning amendments. The City owns several properties that are being evaluated for future disposition. At that time, a Request for Proposal (RFP) would be advertised for project proposals related to those particular parcels.

#### **7. Will existing residents be displaced?**

The zoning will not displace residents. The zoning amendments encourage development on certain underutilized parcels in the vicinity of Union Square. With the Green Line extension being forecast for completion in 2014, and regional market factors, there has been increasing development pressures on Union Square. The proximity of Union Square to Boston and Cambridge and local access to transit will most likely cause increased property values and rents in the area. The zoning amendments being proposed are to provide greater density and mix of uses to offset the gentrification typical of a low-density area with these types of amenities.

#### **8. How many affordable units will be built in Union Square?**

There is no way to predict the number of affordable units that will be built in Union Square, as there is no specific project proposed. However, the proposed zoning requires 12.5% inclusionary housing units in the PUD-C district and 15% inclusionary housing units in the higher density PUD-C1 district. Given the total amount of square feet in the PUD and the minimum lot area/ dwelling unit of 600 SF, there would be a maximum 139 inclusionary units allowed, with an average size of 830 SF.

#### **9. Is 12.5% inclusionary housing normal for this area and adjacent communities?**

The 12.5% affordable housing threshold in Somerville is right in line with Metro Boston standards – cities in the Greater Boston area have inclusionary housing requirements that range from 10% to 15%.

## **10. How many affordable artist live-work units will be built in Union Square?**

There is no way to predict the number of affordable artist live work units to be built in Union Square, as there is no specific project proposed. The PUD does allow that up to 50% of the inclusionary housing units may be dedicated to the use of artist housing, for income-eligible artists. Given other requirements of the PUD zoning, there could be a maximum 67 affordable artist housing units allowed throughout the PUD-C.

## **11. How will artists be certified for affordable artist live work units?**

Each person interested in certification will need to fill out an application and provide a body of work. Each application and related attachments are presented to a peer review committee. The committee will be comprised of a pool of Somerville artists and arts professionals who have been nominated to serve in this capacity. The peer review committee certifies whether each applicant is able to demonstrate that s/he is a working artist. The decision of the peer review committee will be final. If an applicant is not certified during this round, s/he can reapply in a future round with further information to make their case.

## **12. What is FAR and how is it being used in Union Square?**

Floor Area Ratio (FAR) is defined as the ratio of the net floor area of a building or buildings to the total area of the parcel on which it is located. FAR is an indicator of density and is used in zoning to control the mass and scale of development. It does not indicate character, as there could be many styles of buildings with the same FAR but different degrees of façade articulation, roof massing and architectural detail. In formula:

Floor Area Ratio = (Total net floor area of all buildings on a parcel) divided by (Total gross area of the parcel).

## **13. Has there been any consideration for usable open space in Union Square?**

The zoning amendments include a provision that 5% of the PUD's parcel be dedicated to usable public open space. If a development cannot provide this usable open space on the parcel, an open space fund has been established for payment in-lieu. The fund would then be used to acquire and create usable open space in Union Square. There is currently no specific open space plan for Union Square and open space was not specifically addressed in the Union Square Master Plan. There is an existing urban plaza, several small parks, and a percentage of pedestrian space serving the square. There will be a series of workshops this summer to address open space issues and develop a Union Square open space plan and standards.

## **14. How tall is Properzi Manor (existing high rise) in Union Square?**

Properzi Manor is 11 stories tall. Given its residential use and standard ceiling heights, it is assumed that the building is approximately 120 feet tall.

### **15. How are historic properties being handled in the PUD-C and Arts Overlay District?**

Many of the historic areas of Union Square were intentionally left out of the boundaries of the PUD-C where most redevelopment in the square would likely occur. However, there are several historic properties within the Union Square PUD-C district. These parcels have been evaluated and those considered having significant qualities are being surveyed for further historic designation. All historic designated buildings will have the same protection within the PUD-C as those throughout the city. Design guidelines were also established to be sensitive to the historic presence in Union Square.

### **16. Will Webster Avenue and Prospect Street be converted to two-way traffic?**

The preferred alternatives resulting from the 2002 transportation study include two-way Webster Avenue and Prospect Street as well as the reconnection of Washington Street through the square. These are not specifically associated with the Union Square zoning, but are nevertheless important issues that are related. The transportation alternatives will be reevaluated this summer with regard to the issues rising from zoning amendments and especially issues regarding urban design and open space in Union Square. The state has sent out the scope of work related to this additional transportation and engineering work, and the process will include community meetings taking place this fall.

### **17. How can I get more information on the Union Square zoning amendments?**

Information for Union Square zoning amendments can be found on the city website at: [www.ci.somerville.ma.us](http://www.ci.somerville.ma.us). You can also contact the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development at 617-625-6600 x2500. All public meeting notices will be posted on the website as well as at City Hall.

### **18. When can I testify or make comments regarding the proposed zoning?**

A joint public hearing of the Planning Board and Land Use Committee was held on May 17<sup>th</sup> at 6 pm at City Hall in the Aldermanic Chambers on the second floor. Oral testimonies were heard and written comments were accepted. At the hearing, the Planning Board extended its written comment period to June 15<sup>th</sup> at 12 pm and the Land Use Committee extended its written comment period to June 25<sup>th</sup>. Written comments should be addressed to Planning Board c/o Madeleine Masters, Director of Planning and/or Land Use Committee c/o John Long, City Clerk. The address is 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville, MA 02143. Alternatively, you may submit your comment electronically to [MMasters@ci.somerville.ma.us](mailto:MMasters@ci.somerville.ma.us) and/or [JLong@ci.somerville.ma.us](mailto:JLong@ci.somerville.ma.us).